

Miall, Edward (b.1838)

Lecture: Defects of our system of
government... Ottawa, 1892.

Pamph
HC
M

LECTURE.

DEFECTS OF Our System of Government.

DELIVERED BY MR. EDWARD MIALL BEFORE THE LITERARY
AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF OTTAWA ON
3RD FEBRUARY, 1877.

OTTAWA:

C. W. MITCHELL, JOB PRINTER, COR. ELGIN AND QUEEN STS.

1892.

316207-35
b
5

LECTURE.

DEFECTS OF OUR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT.

BY MR. EDWARD MIALL.

Three years ago I had the honor of reading before the members of this Society, a paper upon "Various Forms and Functions of Government." I have selected this year a kindred subject:—one in fact which I intended to have formed a portion of that paper. As I proceeded, however, I found the basis of my argument developed to such goodly dimensions, that I should have taxed beyond measure the patience of my audience had I attempted to build upon it the superstructure, the plan of which I had already decided upon. I dare say, therefore, I shall be excused, if in leading up to my present subject I repeat, in as concise a way as I am able, some of the main features of the paper referred to.

In the first place then, I asserted that forms of Government or Constitutions to be enduring should be the product or outgrowth of the nature and life, the habits and instincts of the people, rather than the result of their deliberate purposes; that their development should be progressive, like the development of individual man, to which that of a nation is markedly analogous; and therefore that Governmental functions, in their nature and extent, must materially differ, in different stages of civilization, in different states of society.

When mankind was set apart in families, a problem was thereby propounded, in the solution of which most of the principles of National Governance might also be evolved. In the development of individual man, there would seem to be four clearly defined periods of growth, each of which calls for a mode of treatment peculiar to itself; namely, infancy, childhood, adolescence and manhood. The first stage calls for unlimited control on the part of the parent, unquestioning submission on that of the child. The vicious and selfish tendencies of human nature assert themselves with his earliest breath, and unrestrained by reason can only be held in check by the efforts of a stronger will. So in National Life the earliest stage of progress has generally (so far as history bears reliable record) been that of reclamation from a state of barbarism and ignorance through the instrumentality of an absolute despotism. In their primitive state of savagery, each member of a tribe or nation, carved out his own fortunes by sheer physical force—Might was the sole measure of Right—and the weakest had practically to acknowledge the force of the doctrine of the survival of the fittest; until by virtue of greater prowess, some powerful chief-

tain asserted his superior will and inaugurated a despotic rule. Under his sway, they learned obedience and self-restraint, which important step towards civilization could perhaps have been taken only by that means ; for uncivilized nations are averse to labor of a continuous kind, and it will be undertaken by them only under compulsion ; and yet no single step can be taken towards civilization except through the charmed avenue of industry. Hence, it has often happened that nations have met their best fortunes in the loss of what they had deemed to be their freedom.

The second stage in the progress of individual development is one mainly of education. The same obedience is required on the part of the governed, but it ceases to be so entirely an unreasoning and unquestioning obedience. The parent abates nothing of his authority, but he strives to persuade rather than to force or bend the will. He offers to the child an occasional explanation of the reasonableness of his demands ; he appeals now to his ambition, now to his sense of duty or perhaps at times to his ripening religious convictions. For the boy has begun to realize that he is connected by innumerable ties of companionship and kinship to the great world of humanity moving around him ; he has begun to realize that if he has desires, they have rights ; if he is pressing forward in pursuit of some fondly cherished idea, they too have each their individual end in view, in some cases running counter to his own ; and he begins to comprehend as his childhood merges into youth, that the blind obedience extorted from him in his earlier years, was but an easy apprenticeship to duty. In the same way the necessity for an absolute despotism disappears, as soon as the governed have learned to discriminate between their own selfish interests, and their individual share in the general interests of the nation of which they form a part. This stage being reached, Absolutism generally gives place to a modified form of Government. Of such a nature was the mild but all-pervasive despotism of Augustus ; or more especially perhaps the extraordinary, and in many respects admirable government of the famous Incas of Peru, who without any contact with the outer world, fused a heterogeneous mass of Indian tribes, into a compact nationality, and by sedulous culture, made them capable of producing works of art, which struck their European conquerors dumb with wonder and admiration.

The third period is that of adolescence, when the restrictions of parental discipline are to a very considerable extent withdrawn, and affectionate counsel substituted in their place. There has been a period analogous to this in the history of every nation, before it has attained to complete self-government. A period when, the stability of national institutions under the preceding regime, having tended to expand commerce and engender wealth, the more influential classes have been admitted to the Monarch's councils. With them he has in a measure shared the responsibilities of government ; on them in return he has showered his honors. In such times aristocracies and feudal tenure had their birth. But it may be remarked here, that if at this important stage the parental authority be too strongly enforced, youthful pride is apt to rebel and domestic anarchy result ; or if tamely submitted to, the incipient spirit of manhood is broken, and the victims of parental oppression becomes unfit to perform the duties, and shoulder the responsibilities which devolve upon him at maturity. He is ever the victim rather than the partial arbiter of circumstances. The history of Revolutions whether in Europe or upon this Continent, supplies the analogy in the one case, while in the other we may refer to the state of the Roman Empire after emerging from the beneficent despotism of Augustus, which prepared the people for the tyranny of Tiberius, and to the almost incredible fact,

that Pizarro and a few hundred adventurers were able to strike terror into the hearts of the Peruvians and hand over their treasure and their territory to the throne of Spain. Then comes the period of maturity, when men and nations enter upon full manhood, and take upon themselves the responsibilities and the duties of self-government. As in the case of a ship, which has let go her moorings in the roadstead, if taut and staunch in hull and spar, and under control of a skilful master, the crew may laugh at what others deem danger and set sail oceanward in every hope of a prosperous voyage. But if the vessel be crank and fragile, and have to contend not only against wind and wave, but a pilot's incapacity, then better were it by far that she should hug fast her moorings than run the risk of being dashed upon the shoals.

It would seem then, that as surely as every step taken by man in his advance from childhood to maturity tends to prepare him for ultimate self-government; so every great movement; whether social, religious or political, which has engaged the attention of mankind since the Middle Ages, has directly or indirectly given fresh force or energy to those principles whose ultimate development is Democracy. To quote the words of De Toqneville, 'The Book "of the Prince is closed forever as a State Manual, and the Book of the people, "a book perhaps of darker sophistries and more pressing tyranny, is as yet unwritten." This tendency in the direction of Democracy is the most uniform, the most ancient, the most permanent and the most irresistible tendency, which is to be found in history, and no discussion bearing upon the proper functions of Governments, or the relative values of Constitutional usages, can be had without weighing its probable results upon the present and the coming ages. It has vanquished kings, destroyed feudal tenures, and planted its heel on the necks of aristocracies, and at this moment capitalists are timidly enquiring who is to be the next victim of its malice. The torrent has been gathering force age after age for centuries. It is impossible that it can now be stayed. *Is it impossible that it may be guided?* The answer to this question no nation ever had a better opportunity of solving and of earning thereby an enduring place in history than Canada.

A metaphor will sometimes convey an impression, which a page of logical sequences would utterly fail to produce. I shall venture to employ one here—Prescott, the historian, tells us that when the Spaniards first landed upon the Peruvian coasts, they gazed with an awe-stricken admiration upon the mountain slopes of the Andes, whose precipitous sides were clothed with luxuriant and cultivated verdure, while terrace upon terrace dotted over with comfortable villas rose upwards almost to the mountain peaks. They wondered at the fertility of the usually barren hillsides; but on enquiry they learned what progress this wonderful but isolated people had made in the science of husbandry, under the tuition of their Incas. High up on the mountains they were informed there were hugh lakes, formed partly by the melting snows and partly from natural springs. These reservoirs were tapped by the people and their waters led through miles of aqueducts built of solid and substantial masonry and thence distributed through a thousand minor irrigating streams, to refresh the thirsty lands below. It were easy to imagine with what destructive force these waters would have plunged down the mountain slopes, when swollen by the heavy rains which are common to all tropical lands; how the habitations of man would have been swept ruthlessly away, and the scanty soil washed down to the plateaus beneath, but for the power which Art thus gave them to turn those otherwise destructive agents to a beneficial use. Now it is hardly necessary to interpret the picture. We are in the presence of a power, as potent, and if not judi-

cially turned to account, as baneful and irresistible as a mountain torrent,—but which may be led into channels and distributed over the land in such a manner as to vitalize the energies, and educate the minds of the masses. Is our Governmental system of a nature to attain this end? I confess, with regret, I do not think it is,—I cannot avoid the conclusion that our Constitution was rather the result of the deliberate purposes of our public men, than the product and outgrowth of the nature and life, the habits and instincts of the Canadian people. It owes its birth rather to the necessities of political parties, than to the matured convictions of the leaders of public thought; and to provide for those necessities, we have been saddled with legislative machinery enough to govern a nation of forty millions; the weight of which will prove so burdensome, financially and otherwise, that some modification will have to be sought or the country's growth will be seriously retarded. Prior to Confederation, the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec had in their Township and County Councils an organization which was the pride of the country. It is true they still exist, but the creation of the Provincial Houses of Parliament has dwarfed their importance. Inexpensive as they were efficient, they enlisted the services of the best men in each locality to administer the affairs of the Township or Municipality. These Township Councillors were of necessity in advance of the average elector, and their Reeves who were chosen from amongst themselves, constituted the County Council. The Warden of the County being elected by this body—already two grades removed from the level of the original electorate—was generally a man of promise and ability. These men gave their services for the benefit of the community, within which all their interests were centred. The matters coming under their review, were matters with which every resident was more or less conversant and upon which he could express his convictions, more or less, intelligently to his neighbors. In his own locality, every man had a certain weight, and he felt that he was a part of the whole; he learned to discriminate between his own selfish interests and his individual share in the general interest of the community for he came into personal, and almost daily contact, with those whom his voice had aided in placing in the Council; with them he conversed upon matters of local interest; from them he gained intelligent ideas respecting the general political questions of the day; by them he was gradually being educated up to a higher political standard. Had these organizations been extended to the incoming Provinces, and no intermediate power created between them and the general Parliament of the Dominion, a short ten years would have effectually buried everything like sectionalism and found us a united people. Indeed, I cannot but regard the establishment of the Provincial Governments, rather than the development of the more local system of Government, by means of County Councils as the pivotal error of the Union—the main defect in our Constitution.

Firstly: It has tended, and must increasingly tend to perpetuate provincial instincts, to aggravate sectional feelings and prejudices, and to render the growth of a healthy national sentiment almost impossible. The Electoral body of Canada will probably compare favorably with that of any other country, but in the struggle for a living—few only can find time to pursue the study of political theories, or even to master the general political questions of the day. Their sympathies can hardly be expected to extend very far beyond the pale of local questions, which are forced upon their attention by their daily observations. Men readily become local politicians, because their individual interests are impinged upon by local legislation. But it would be irrational to expect the great mass of the people to take any deep or intelligent interest in matters which affect them only indirectly, and which many of them cannot understand to affect them at all. If there were no halting place between our local sympa-

thies and those which should embrace the entire Dominion, that sympathy would in many cases be given ; but as long as the old Provincial lines of demarcation continue to exist, the sympathies of the great mass of the people will be circumscribed by those lines.

Then, secondly : While the Provincial system calls for more public men, the provincial jealousies, which it fosters and keeps actively alive, limit the area from which to select the talent required for the Government of the country. Surely an adequate representation of every Province in both Houses of Parliament ought to be a sufficient guarantee that its interests will be duly respected without limiting the choice of coadjutors by the Premier, by territorial restrictions. Men of wide experience, of broad and liberal views, and of comparatively independent means, combined with administrative ability, are far too scarce to allow of any limitation of the area from which to make the choice. With a population of less than four million, the Dominion requires, under the present régime the services of nearly seven hundred legislators, a number almost as great as are required to legislate for Great Britain and her numerous dependencies.

But, Thirdly :—The cost of the machinery necessary to carry out the Provincial System is worthy of very serious consideration. The expenditure upon Agriculture and Immigration, upon Education, Charitable Institutions, the management of Crown Lands and Local Works, would take place under other systems as freely as under the one now in operation,—but there are classes of expenditure, which are due *solely* to the establishment of the separate Provincial Governments,—which might in a great measure be saved under a Legislative Union. Having gone carefully over the Public Accounts of the four large Provinces, noting those items only which come under the class referred to, I find the aggregate cost to the people of the Dominion to be not less than a million of dollars per annum ; a sum which, if annually saved and invested at 5%, *would in forty years* (which is but a short period in the life of a nation) extinguish the entire debt of the Dominion, amounting to at the present moment (after deducting the assets) to 120 millions of dollars.

Fourthly : It might be mentioned too, by the way, that the multiplicity of elections, and the ease with which men of very ordinary capacity can foist themselves into positions of public trust, has a tendency to create a retinue of political adventurers ; while the evil is magnified by the growing indifference of the electors, who in many cases, can see little room for choice between the opposing candidates. Perhaps, however, the most serious evil resulting from the building up of an intermediate power is the tendency to weakness at the extremities. Whatever authority is vested in the Provincial Governments, must be filched away from either the Counties or the Central Executive, both of which require in their own spheres to be strong. I have already stated that every great movement, whether social, political or religious, which has taken place since the Middle Ages, has tendered to the development of the Democratic sentiment. This has been the result, because the intellectual struggle accompanying those movements has given birth to, or rather brought to the light, certain great truths, bearing upon the rights of the individual in regard to his social, religious or political duties. Now these truths appear to have cast such a glarc upon the world that men have been blinded. Some seize the objects which that light has brought into view, but many grasp at the shadows. The first are real, the second illusory. Let me explain *my* meaning more fully. About the middle of last century, the powerful and logical mind of Adam Smith was led to enquire into the laws underlying the production and distribution of wealth. He evolved some profound

truths and laid the basis of a new science. Since then no man was deemed fit to aspire to a leading position in the Councils of the country who had not become familiar with the principles of political economy. The novelty and the truth of his deductions startled the world, and men lost sight of the fact and have done so to this day—that the author of “The Wealth of Nations” wrote also the “Theory of the Moral Sentiments.” The one pointed the road to wealth, the other the way to happiness. The one was an argument based on expediency—the other on the higher considerations of Duty and Love. Blinded by the dazzling lustre of truths, so long hidden from view, men lost sight of the premises on which these truths were based, and came to assume the new found science to be “The Truth.” They took it for their Bible, and from that time to the present, nothing which could in the slightest degree retard the production of wealth (for they have not an equal care as to its distribution), even though it might engender every other virtue which could bring happiness to a nation, has had a chance of a hearing. Adam Smith did not argue that the only way to national happiness was the adoption of those principles, which would tend most surely to the production and accumulation of wealth. He simply pointed out the laws under which wealth was accumulated and distributed. In like manner men of profound intellect and irrepressible moral courage contended for man’s right to serve the Almighty in accordance with the dictates of his own individual conscience; and hence against the civil power being in any way used to further the projects or the interests of any ecclesiastical party or body. Men of inferior mind, with a parrot-like capacity for repeating maxims without having the capacity to comprehend the real bases on which the originator of the ideas they affected to worship, rested their conclusions, mistook the war against ecclesiasticism for one against religion. Those who insisted most strenuously upon the maintenance of individual rights, would have shrunk back in horror from the doctrine that religious convictions were quite unnecessary in a statesman, or that the policy of a State should be based solely upon principles of Political Economy. There was no rebellion against the work of the Almighty in their hearts, the rebellion was against the work of man. The tendency to materialism on the part of many in the present day, is but a revolt against the hollow fripperies of ecclesiasticism. The soul can never be satisfied with stones instead of bread.

But the error with which we have specially to deal is that which pervades political society of the present day, not only on this continent, but also in Britain. The student of constitutional history, can hardly fail as he watches the struggles of his ancestors to free themselves from the illegal and tyrannical exactions of their monarchs, and their interested courtesans, to sympathize with them, as they forced the Sovereign to surrender, one by one, many of those privileges the unscrupulous use of which rendered them little better than serfs. Whether resisting the greed of Henry the Seventh, or the arbitrary impositions of Wolsey, or in later times, insisting upon the recognition of their parliamentary rights, in spite of the alternate cajoleries and menaces of a James or a Charles, they have, through much tribulation, laid the foundation of that noble constitutional structure, which has made Britain the first and most powerful nation of modern times. All honour to them for it. But we must not allow a sentiment in favor of individual freedom to carry us too far. National liberty is an unmixed boon; individual freedom may easily transcend those bounds, the passing of which may barter the blessings of national liberty for the tyranny of the mob. The rights of the individual are in little danger of being overridden in a self-governing community, but the watchwords of liberty burnt into the national heart by centuries of vigilance and suffering; may, under changed

conditions of society, be taken up by political charlatans (and even by honest men who do not understand the relativity of truth), and converted into fire-brands, which shall destroy the laborious work of ages in a few short years. Extend the rights of the subject or the citizen indefinitely, and society will revert again to its earliest stage. It may be taken for granted that the struggle of the future will be on the part of the State against the encroachments of the individual ; and if in the struggle that is coming, the forces of the state are to be marshalled under generals, who are so trammelled by the country's constitutional usages that they are forced to give up the tactics of statesmen and adopt a policy of temporising and expediency, then all hope of ever attaining the dignity of a great nation has forever fled.

These remarks bring us to the second great defect of our existing sys' em; viz. the growing weakness of the Administrative, as opposed to the Legislative portions of our governmental machinery. Every one will be willing to admit that the duties or functions of Administrative and Legislative bodies are widely different, and call for a different class of talent ; that a body admirably fitted for the one, would be utterly unfit for the other ; and yet, our usages have reduced the Executive arm of our governmental system to such a state of dependency upon the Legislature, that unless something is done to modify it, the latter will by degrees become the sole power in the State.

No Government can be vigorous in its policy, which only holds its trust from year to year ; for virtually the failure to carry a majority of the Legislature upon any given scheme, to which an Administration has committed itself, not only defeats the scheme but virtually defeats the Administration. Surely that system which forces a member of Parliament to vote in favor of a measure which has not his conscientious approval, because his vote against it might aid in the defeat of an Administration in whose general course he had full confidence, must be wrong. There need be no fear of the Executive of a county having representative institutions becoming dangerously powerful, the fault will always be in the other direction. Jealously watch your local privileges and the more power you give to the central government, the better you enable it to carry out the expressed convictions of the people. The Executive are in fact a committee of the people, and should be allowed great latitude in the discharge of their administrative duties. In relation to the subject, I cannot do better than quote the words of Alexander Hamilton, one of the principal founders of the United States Constitution : He said, " There are " some who would be inclined to regard the servile pliancy of the Executive " to a prevailing current either in the community or legislature as its best " recommendation. But such men entertain very crude notions, as well of the " purpose for which Government was instituted as of the true means by which " public happiness may be promoted. The Republican principle demands that " the deliberative sense of the community should govern the conduct of those " to whom they entrust the management of their affairs ; but it does not " require an unqualified complaisance to every sudden breeze which the " people may receive from the arts of men, who flatter their prejudices to " betray their interests. It is a just observation that the people commonly " intend the public good. This often applies to their very errors. But their " good sense would despise the adulator who should pretend that they always " reason right."

The fitful gusts of public sentiment often betray a woeful want of wisdom, but the sober second-thought of a free and intelligent people, generally tends to the conservation of morality and truth. It remains for our political thinkers to

discover some mode by which the Government of the day may be ultimately amenable to the latter, while being enabled to resist the former. "Those who are afraid, (said the late Sir Arthur Help) lest we should have 'too much paternal Government should remember that in default of *paternal* government, we may have *fraternal* government; a form of rule which has always partaken largely of the relations which subsisted between those two brothers "of whom we have the earliest record."

Having now just touched most of the leading defects pertaining to our Governmental machinery, it seems desirable before proceeding, to point out what appear to be possible remedies, to refer in a few words to the deficiencies in our electoral system, more especially to the virtual disfranchisement of a considerable proportion of recognized voters. I do not refer to the mere disfranchisement of minorities as usually understood, but to the disfranchisement of classes. I am aware that owing to the inequality in the number of voters in one constituency, as compared with another, an administration may fail to obtain the return of a majority of representatives in the Dominion House of Commons, while the aggregate votes of the whole electoral body throughout the country may be cast in their favor. Under the circumstances this may not be an unmixed evil, because it is difficult to show that representation based solely upon numbers is philosophically sound, and hence any circumstances which tend to modify the effect, or result of a vote taken upon such a basis, may really tend in the direction of a representation of minorities. However, assuming it to be an evil, a further one will still remain unadjusted, even if it could be shown that the number of representatives returned were in exact proportion to the aggregate votes cast for either of the contending political parties.

Society is, always has been, and always will be, composed of various classes; merchants and mechanics, professional men, manual laborers, land holders, middlemen and capitalists. These may be massed under three distinctive heads—Capitalists and laborers and those who are partly both. By laborers is meant all that class who earn their living by mechanical, menial, mental and manual labor. The interests of all these classes, though really identical with, are generally thought to be antagonistic to those of the capitalist, and it is only owing to the fact that a very considerable proportion of our laboring classes are also land-holders and small capitalists, that the country has not suffered more from ill digested class legislation. Those who have given any thought to the matter know that wealth can only be produced by the mystic intermarriage of land and labour; but capital must find the supplies for the laborer while the seasons are maturing the fruits of the earth, as well as the implements, without the use of which labor would be impotent. Even the store of professional knowledge reserved in the brain of the lawyer, and the doctor, represents years of capital expenditure at an earlier stage, and yet, were it not for the fact, that numbers of laborers are actually, or *potentially* capitalists also, to however limited an extent, what kind of legislation could be looked for, from representatives of an electoral body five-sixths of whom are of the laboring classes. Taking this view of the case, many will be prepared to admit then that representation based only upon numbers is not, philosophically, a sound one; and that some filtering or rectifying process is upon those grounds desirable.

Again, Society is in its general organization very like a vast army. It is quite impossible that all the private soldiers in an army should know a great deal as to the qualification and characteristics of the General in command. They know their immediately superior officers, because they are being constantly

brought into contact with them; these officers know more of their captains than do the rank and file; they again are brought into contact with officers of higher grades, until the staff of the Commander-in-Chief is reached. It is certainly not too much to say, that if a private soldier wished to know something of the temper, aims, character, capacity of his commander, he would rather trust the opinion of the members of that commander's staff than his own infrequent and fortuitous observations:—Is it not so in the political arena? Leading men in most communities come frequently in contact in the mart, or on the exchange, or committees for this purpose or that, and in society. They see each other upon other occasions than when soliciting votes for parliamentary or municipal honors, and they can form unbiassed opinions as to the character, aims, motives and calibre of those whom they meet thus. Each of these has more or less co-laborers of a lower social or commercial grade, whose interests are one with his own;—and if he approve himself trustworthy, they learn to trust him; and so the ramifications extend down and down to the electoral base of the community. It can hardly be doubted that if the original electoral body—having selected certain men for *other than electoral* purposes, were to allow them to act on their behalf in the choice of representatives for the Dominion Parliament a much wiser choice would be made than is oftentimes made by the electors themselves; who are often called upon to choose between two candidates, totally unknown to them except by repute, and what is repute at such times but an artful admixture of adulation and slander.

Now to recapitulate; what has been the general drift of our argument so far as we have gone?

1. That by the facts of history as also by analogy we are led to conclude—that it cannot be predicated of any particular form or mode of Government, or of any particular set of constitutional usages, that they are absolutely right and fitting, in themselves, or that they are even desirable, in every stage of National progress, in every state of society. They must be in harmony with the social forces which dominate the people; and that consequently any effort to frame the governmental institutions of a country upon a preconceived plan, and without due regard to the nature, habits and conditions of its people, must end in discomfiture and dissatisfaction on the part of the governed, or feebleness on the part of the governing body.

2. That history and analogy, likewise lead us to conclude that the persistent tendency of all intelligent peoples is towards self-government; which can only be had through the instrumentality of representatives, ultimately amenable to the will of the electoral body.

3. That the Central Executive body of a free people should not be so constantly dependent upon the Legislative body, as to rob it of vigor, and promptitude of action, or originality of design.

4. That the establishment of Provincial Governments under the British American Act was rather a compromise, effected by political parties, than a requirement of the Canadian people, or the natural development of their nature or instincts.

5. That the Governments so referred to, are a bar to the creation of anything like a healthy national sentiment.

6. That they demand the service of a greater proportion of men, capable of legislative duties than the country can spare from its professional, mercantile and industrial classes.

7. That the expenditure caused by such separate Governments is tending to crush out the commercial life and energy of the people.

8. That their establishment has tended to dwarf the importance of the more truly local bodies as well as to weaken the Central Government, both of which should be strong ; and which in combination are quite equal to the proper performance of the Governmental duties of the country.

9. That the present electoral system being based solely upon numbers, tends (except for certain fortuitous circumstances) to the disfranchisement of certain classes, and seems to demand some filtering or rectifying process which should render its results innocuous.

Now I have no favorite nostrum to air, no Platonic Republic, or other Utopian project to submit for popular acceptance, or rejection ; but if the line of argument followed will bear criticism, if the difficulties pointed out are not illusory but real—a reconsideration of the whole question by the leaders of public opinion may be entered upon, without subjecting themselves to the charge of desiring change for its own sake.

The following questions bearing upon the matter, may be fairly submitted for discussion to the Canadian Press, and if discussed in a fair and patriotic spirit, and with the sole view of reaching a truthful solution, their consideration cannot but result beneficially to the community.

1st. Is not the machinery of the Dominion Government in association with the existing, or a modified system of Municipal, Township and County Councils, quite sufficient for the wants of the country ?

2nd. Is the representation of minorities desirable, and if so, cannot some feasible method of securing it be discovered ?

3rd. Cannot some plan be devised, whereby the administration of the day may be less subject than at present to undue influences on the part of individual members of the Legislative Branch ? And would not a thorough reform of the Civil Service, and the abolition of the system of patronage, go far to remedy the evil referred to ?

4th. Is it possible to devise some scheme which would permit of at least a few of the Legislative body being chosen, by a picked body responsible to the people, but not merely delegates chosen with a view to this duty ?

5. Is there no way of restraining the tendency towards a too prodigal expenditure by Municipal bodies ?

With reference to the first, pointing as it does, if answered affirmatively, to the abolition of the Provincial Governments, I have nothing further to say than has already been said. I am quite aware that the proposition will evoke, at the outset, a general, if not almost universal opposition in political circles, inasmuch as it would relegate to a narrower sphere, and one pecuniarily less desirable, many who now occupy leading positions. Besides, re-organization involves hard, continuous and painstaking effort even to achieve in theory, and still harder to lay acceptably before the people in such a way as to command their approval. Ennui and laissez-faire are the most powerful motors (if I may use a paradoxical expression) in the political world; and it requires a bold man to attack them especially when many who should co-operate with him are sure to be found in the ranks of the enemy. But the main objection urged will probably be, that the very *raison d'être* of the Provincial Governments, was the determination on the part of the Provinces, each partaking of marked national and religious characteristics, to retain in their own hands, the control of local legislation. As regards this, although I doubt very much whether the people were half so anxious on this behalf, as were politicians, and ecclesiastics—a compact is a compact, and should in spirit, be rigidly adhered to. Inasmuch, however, as the tendency of any change in the direction indicated, would be to throw the powers and privileges now granted to the provinces, into the hands of smaller bodies

more directly under the control or at any rate within the purview of the people, I can see no insuperable difficulties in the way on this account.

With reference to the representation of minorities, having carefully gone over the figures, I find that setting aside all members elected by acclamation and a few others in cases where reliable figures were not at hand, the aggregate votes given in favor of 128 members of the Dominion Commons at the last general election was 158,000, those given for Candidates who were unsuccessful 118,000, and those who apparently refrained from voting at all, 123,000. The sitting members therefore would appear to represent only 40 per cent. of the electoral body. Whether the non-voters refrained from exercising their franchise simply from indifference, or for some more substantial reason, it is quite clear that the House cannot be said to be authoritatively the representative even of a majority. I wish it to be understood here, that I am not referring to the present House, but to any House chosen by the same means.

May it not be fairly assumed that a considerable proportion of the non-voters were such, because, whether they voted for one candidate or the other, they were simply endorsing this political party or that, which in neither case, they desired to do. Whereas, had they been assured that their vote would have been efficacious, if cast in favor of some non-party man, in whose prudence and judgment they had confidence, it would have been given. If there is really a desire that minorities should be represented, there does not appear to be any great difficulty in the way. If for Electoral purposes, three of the present Ridings were associated, each elector having three votes, which might be cast singly for each candidate or all for one, (upon the principle known as cumulative voting), the three candidates having the greatest number of votes being elected, the minority might always be represented, if they chose to organize and act in concert; and I am of opinion that by such a method many able and valuable men, would be made available, who now have no chance of election, simply because they will not be dragged through the mire of either political party.

The election of men of this class would do much to effect the solution of the next problem. They would become a bulwark of strength to a just and competent administration, where political parties apart from them, were pretty equally balanced. The Government of the day would not be so entirely at the mercy of their avowed supporters, and could afford to take higher ground in the discharge of their administrative functions. Moreover, if some reward were offered for good service, if for example, any member of the Cabinet who had been endorsed by two successive parliaments were able to retire upon half pay for the remainder of his life, I think it would conduce to raise the standard of public morality. Poverty often drives men to hold office, when honor would suggest its relinquishment. The sins of ministers are far more frequently those arising from weakness, than from any vicious tendency on their own part.

In this connection it would be impossible to attach too much importance to the desirability of a thorough reform of the Civil Service, and of a system of examinations which would make merit and attainments the road to entrance and preferment, instead of merely political partizanship. The existing system of political patronage to quote from a very able article in the Canadian monthly, written by one of the most prominent members of the Dominion Parliament, Mr. G. E. Casey,

"Gives no guarantee of efficiency in the service even if worked with ideal honesty and impartiality. It is a standing temptation to those who wield it, to transgress these principles, which, as a matter of fact, are not

" universally observed. It restricts the field of choice unfairly excludes a large minority (? majority) of the citizens, and discourages the ablest men in the country from entering the service. It degrades the reputation of the service and makes it a partisan organization."

" It injures the self-respect of all parties concerned in working it. It embitters party feelings and lowers the tone of political sentiment, and,

" Finally it inevitably tends to grow worse and to introduce here the unmitigated evils which, in its full blown stage, it has inflicted upon our neighbors."

And he might have added, tends very materially to the subserviency of the Administration to the Legislature, while the balancing of party claims in even the meanest appointment necessarily occupies much of the time really required by the public business of the country. There is not one word to be said in its favor, and yet successive ministries have shirked the task of rooting up the evil, admitted by all, a fact which proves its tendency in the imputed direction without any further comment. With reference to the fourth question advanced, it has occurred to me at times, that if some of the more important duties of Provincial government were thrown upon the county organizations, and the system of political patronage effaced, there might be some hope of a number of these councils being elected solely with a view to their fitness for the public duties entrusted to them, especially if the question of education came under their control with all its absorbing interests. In such a case four instead of three of the existing Ridings might be associated together as an Electoral District. One member to be appointed by the associated county council, and three by the cumulative vote of the present electoral body. An arrangement of this nature would possibly not only make provisions for a representation of minorities, but would induce a superior man here and there to offer himself, who would never submit to the ordeal of a contest, and further the process of filtration by which this packed body of electors would become members of that Council, would ensure under ordinary circumstances, the selection of a better class of representative than would be selected by the average elector.

The fifth question involves the whole problem of the rights of capital and those of labor. I do not hope to cut this Gordian knot by a single blow, but it is so manifestly unfair, that the many who pay hardly anything in the way of municipal taxation should be empowered to force those who do into expensive schemes, that every effort should be made to lay the matter before the public in hope that in time the public conscience may be aroused to a sense of the injustice.

It does not appear to me impossible to lay down a table of expenditures, which should be deemed to be ordinary expenditure, and which should be controlled by the Municipal Council as a whole. All other expenditure should have the endorsement of the taxpayers whose voice for this purpose and this only, should be graduated in accordance with the amount of taxes paid by the voter. To avoid submitting each separate question the names of the members of the Council as elected by the direct vote of the people might be resubmitted to them for endorsement by the property holders, each of whom should have one vote for every \$10 taxation paid by him, and the three or five members of such Council receiving the highest number of votes should constitute a kind of inner Council, without the consent of a majority of which as well as a majority of the Council as a whole, no extraordinary expenditure should be deemed to be lawful.

